

PRINCIPLES TO GUIDE DIPLOMACY AND ASSISTANCE TO CENTRAL AMERICA

Below excerpts from a document on recommendations to help guide the Biden Administration's diplomatic efforts and assistance to Central America prepared by a group of U.S.-based civil society organizations:

- The focus of U.S. assistance to Central America should be on developing an appropriate, long-term strategy to help address the region's challenges and not a debate about assistance levels. More money does not equal success. Aid is needed but it needs to be adequately targeted and strategic. It would be helpful to build into the 5-year strategy called for by Congress in the FY 2021 NDAA, a plan to ensure that specific funding does not need to be spent per year as this can often lead to additional pressure to spend disburse money in a hurried and wasteful manner and inadvertently result in funding corrupt entities.
- The 5-year strategy should include benchmarks, such as the ones outlined in the accompanying document, and clearly defined metrics or indicators to measure progress and impact over time and should be developed in consultation with a broad range of civil society organizations in Central America and the United States, including those organizations representing historically marginalized groups.
- It is important that the Administration practice principles of transparency, access to information, and accountability by ensuring that information regarding the U.S. strategy and assistance is publicly available in English and Spanish and by taking seriously regular consultations with civil society in the region and in the United States. Consultations should include the development of the initial strategy, policy dialogue, USAID programming, as well as around certification criteria, and should not be limited to USAID grantees.
- The Administration should make clear that strong diplomacy (actions by embassies, the State Department, sanctions & enforcement of conditions) is as important to the administration's strategy as assistance.
- Every effort should be made to incorporate other donors and particularly the international financial institutions in pursuing broad and essential governance and justice reforms in their own programming.

Governance, Anti-corruption and Human Rights

- Make democratic governance the common thread for dealing with prosperity and security issues. The main impediments to sustained, broad-based economic growth and improved security in the Northern Triangle are the deep structural challenges related to corruption and weak democratic governance. The absence of strong democratic governance exacerbates weak government administration, which in turn leads to deepening poverty,

widespread violence and crime, a lack of quality basic services, and a lack of economic competitiveness, among other challenges.

- Transparency and access to information are key to promoting democratic governance and greater accountability. The U.S. should support an independent evaluation of existing access to information regimes in the Northern Triangle and take action to promote their strengthening.
- Make explicit that anti-corruption efforts should not only target government corruption but include corruption perpetrated or enabled by members of the private sector and other private individuals. The use of targeted sanctions should be applied strategically and also target private individuals and members of the private sector who have engaged, facilitated or benefited from grand corruption.
- U.S. banking regulators should ensure that U.S. banks, particularly those with affiliates and subsidiaries in the region, are investigating and reporting on possible money-laundering and other corrupt transactions.
- Anti-corruption efforts should also include support for independent regional anti-corruption mechanisms investigating, monitoring and reporting on corruption in government as well as the private sector.
- U.S. diplomacy and aid should prioritize support for civil society actors working for change, and include urging governments to reverse measures closing civic space or criminalizing the legitimate activities of nongovernmental groups, social movements, and journalists. Showing visible diplomatic support for organizations and individuals at risk and for freedom of association should be a prominent feature of the administration's strategy towards the region.
- As part of the administration's commitment to advancing human rights and emphasizing multilateral approaches, provide funding for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights offices in Guatemala and Honduras, and for the regional office in Panama and its work in El Salvador.
- The embassies should coordinate annual reviews of human rights conditions in each country with local civil society, private sector and government, and the State Department and USAID should replicate those efforts with NGOs here.

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